

The Great Green Career Quest: Superior Strategies for Success

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Ryan Johnston,¹ Research Assistant, Michigan Renewable Energy Program²



When embarking on a green job or career search, advantages accrue to those who have a good understanding of the field and those who are ready to employ the best strategies in their search. Both of these factors, when combined with appropriate experience and education, will help to support the kind of personal confidence that is most likely to lead to success. Whatever your situation may be – just launching into your profession, fresh out of college; encountering a mid-career crossroads; or suddenly out of work as a result of circumstances beyond your control – the idea of a new green job or green career has piqued your interest. This publication seeks to introduce green jobs and careers, and empower individuals with the best available tools to assist in completing a successful quest.

What Are Green Jobs?

Varying interpretations and tons of current media coverage and popular buzz can result in confusion about exactly what is a “green” job or career. According to *Green Jobs: A Guide to Eco-Friendly Employment* (Llewellyn, 2008), green:

“generically...has described something that has a benign or moderate effect on the environment. By extension, green jobs, or green-collar jobs are those connected to eco-friendly products and services and associated with work that contributes to sustainable environment and better economy” (p. 17).

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition says sustainable is “of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged.”³ So, where exactly is the green movement headed? As more consumers demand less wasteful and more energy-efficient and environmentally friendly products, companies will continue to respond. “Today, two-thirds of Americans consider themselves either active participants or supporters of the environmental movement” (Llewellyn, Hendrix, Golden, 2008, p. 7).

 *companies can no longer ignore the...green shift* 

As a result of this type of public opinion and growing numbers of businesses’ stakeholders demanding greater environmental consciousness and performance, companies can no longer ignore the widespread green shift. Businesses have begun to change strategies from minimally complying with government regulations to being proactive in their approach to greening. From hybrid cars to furniture made from sustainable resources to organic foods, everyone seems to be going green in some way or another. The shift aims towards both environmental improvement and the creation of more sustainable economies; from the local

to the state, national, and global levels. As Llewellyn, Hendrix, and Golden (2008) explain, the widespread green transformation in attitudes and behaviors is not only about the environment:

Our dependence on fossil fuels, for example, not only fouls our air but gravely threatens our national security and our economic prosperity. Our current economy produces not just too much climate pollution, but too little opportunity for those living on the economic margins... .” (p. 4).

Where does this broad array of thinking leave the green job hunter and green career planner? You’ll ultimately have to develop your own idea of what shade of green meets your needs, and how your green objectives fit into the overall context of your quest.

How Do I Search for a Green Job?

Techniques for searching for and securing a green job are practically the same as for any type of job, and green job opportunities abound. Be prepared that your job hunt may last longer than usual given the state of the economy. According to Bolles (2010, p.7), as of June 17, 2009, almost four million people in the United States had been looking for work for twenty-seven weeks or more. The best advice is to use this time wisely to find a job that will truly fit your needs, instead of allowing yourself to become discouraged by what may require a marathon effort. Here is a summary of the process the best coaches recommend for successful searches:

¹ Mr. Johnston is a senior at Michigan State University, completing a B.S. Degree in Construction Management. He is currently employed as a Student Assistant with the Michigan Public Service Commission. Past employment includes a variety of labor and management positions at small and large-scale construction companies, some of which work in the renewable energy industry.

² The Michigan Renewable Energy Program (MREP) was established by the legislature, and is implemented by the Public Service Commission, to promote the use of and education about renewable energy in the state; <http://www.michigan.gov/mrep>.

³ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/SUSTAINABLE>, retrieved 25 Jan 2010.

Identify Your Direction

There is a question that must be answered first and foremost. What does success mean to you? Different people ultimately have different views on success in life. A 2007 University of Chicago study indicates what people most value in a job: “The most satisfying jobs are mostly professions, especially those involving caring for, teaching, and protecting others and creative pursuits,” said Tom W. Smith, Director of the General Social Survey (GSS) at the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. Bill Gates left Microsoft to run his philanthropic foundation full time; expanding educational opportunities and access to information technology. This just goes to show that even those with power and fortune may adopt a different connotation of success over time, in order to gain personal satisfaction. Whatever your definition of success, the green field can be very rewarding. But, you need to determine what success means to you.

The next important question to address is, what are your values?

“They are deeply held convictions that develop from your culture, your experiences, and how others behave towards you. Your values motivate you and determine how you relate to the world around you...You may not always be aware of them, but your values are always present, always a part of who you are, and always influencing what you do” (Llewellyn, Hendrix, Golden, 2008, p. 29).

Not everyone can simply recite their values off the tip of their tongue. *The Job-Hunter's Survival Guide* (Bolles, 2009), *Do What You Are* (Tieger and Barron, 2007), and *Green Jobs* (Llewellyn, 2008) all provide systematic processes to self evaluate what you value in life and learn how to apply it to a career. Llewellyn, Hendrix, and Golden (2008) propose that readers self-direct their search for a job by asking and answering a series of questions in four categories: life, location, personal, and work. Internet sites such as Stewart, Cooper, and Coon, Inc.,

(2006) and Quintessential Careers (2010) offer interactive tests to evaluate personal values important in career path decisions. In rating the importance of various standards such as “flexibility in work structure” or “adventure and excitement” the user can bring to light their own values. Probing questions from these kinds of references will help a job-seeker define what they want to do; identify fields of greatest interest; inventory existing experience and training and compare that to what a new field of interest will require; and explore the most favorable location for future work.

Once you recognize the core values that can guide your search, be prepared to ask interviewers what to describe their organization’s culture and work style. If their answers match your values, then working at that company may be a good fit.

Start with the Basics

The basic tools and techniques for job or career-hunting are the same for green jobs as for any other kind. For example, creating a resume, writing customized cover letters, focusing your search, targeting delivery to promising opportunities, and preparing for interviews are not different. “What’s different is the slant you give your search and the questions you pose to your prospective employers” (Llewellyn, Hendrix, Golden, 2008, p. 32).

In order to link your values, skills, and interests to the right job, perform a little research to gain an understanding of the types of jobs emerging. Book stores and libraries can contain the latest industry information; proving to be both educational and valuable. *Green Careers: Choosing Work for a Sustainable Future* is a popular book that provides an industry by industry overview on green jobs. In this work, Cassio and Rush (2009) write about ninety different occupations in twelve different career groups. Not only does their book provide information on these jobs, but it includes case studies and interviews with people working in green careers. Also, the Advanced Technology Environmental and Energy

Center (ATEEC; www.ateec.org), part of the Eastern Iowa Community College District, provides a partial list of downloadable energy and environmental occupation charts. These charts break down possible occupation categories and job titles that can exist in them. The Michigan Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives released a report on the state’s green jobs in May of 2009.⁴ That report contains information on wages, trends, and even Michigan jobs that are in demand.

Wisely Use Internet Tools

The internet can be helpful, but it should not be your only tool and you should learn to use it wisely. How can you know which web sites and services will prove worthwhile? A simple search for “green jobs” results in a hoard of sites that purport to assist matchmaking between companies and applicants. The key is identifying sites that will produce the best results.

Mansfield (2009) recommends six ways to search the green jobs field while limiting the time spent tracking individual job boards. Rather than clicking from site to site, she explains, you should set up an account that will organize RSS feeds from popular job boards. A RSS (really simple syndication) feed is a way to easily collect a list of update notices from preferred websites. Computer programs can then organize the multiple notices for easy reading. Put more simply, as businesses make posts relevant to your search, the notices will be delivered to your RSS reader program. This way you can see at a glance when new jobs are posted without being bogged down by having to visit numerous sites.

⁴ Michigan Green Jobs Report: Occupations & Employment in the New Green Economy; http://www.michigan.gov/documents/nwlb/GJC_GreenReport_Print_277833_7.pdf.

Productivity Portfolio⁵ provides detailed instructions on using this handy feature in your job search.

Installing a simple add-on to your Internet browser, such as Alexa's ranking toolbar, can show which job-search boards are generating the most traffic. Appendix A lists many popular green job-search websites. On at least several of these, create a search using specific keywords for the kinds of jobs and locations you are interested in and open to. This kind of search will automatically retrieve relevant information for you, from multiple web sites. Over time, this function may help you to identify particular web sites with the most traffic for your preferred employment and location choices.



As you find companies of interest, research them, too. Visit their websites, but also seek information about them from other sources; such as news articles and trade publications. While doing this, also keep on the lookout for similar companies and related Industries, that may also represent values similar to your own.

Social media web sites can also be very helpful in making direct connections with hiring managers. High traffic Internet sites, such as LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com), provide opportunities for connecting with professionals in the widest range of industries. The profile interface on LinkedIn is used to set up an online resume highlighting your qualifications, including education, past and present employment experiences, and more. LinkedIn can also be used to view job postings, learn who posted a position, and perhaps discover if you already know someone at the same company or in a related business, based on your connections with the LinkedIn user community.

In Michigan, NextEnergy has recently inaugurated an *Advanced Energy Technology Network* (www.aetnetwork.org), that is open to

listing green energy stakeholders and technology development opportunities in our state. And, both the Great Lakes Renewable Energy Association (www.glrea.org) and Midwest Renewable Energy Association (www.the-mrea.org) include on their websites directories of business members, many of which are Michigan companies. Conveniently, creating an account and searching online databases is free and open to anyone, on a vast majority of these kinds of websites.

Making internet contacts is beneficial, but you'll want to be sure to follow up on any promising leads you discover on line by making appointments with at least some of the contacts you are discovering. Once again, be careful though: According to Richard Bolles, in *What Color is Your Parachute?* (2010, p. 28), only 4-10% of job seekers find their jobs online. Bolles urges job seekers to use two to four methods to look for work; no more and no less.

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According to Bolles, research shows that 51% of people who use just one search method give up within the first month. Given two search methods, only 31% give up (2010, p. 26 - 27). The internet is a great resource, but when it comes to job searching, it is foolish to put all your eggs into any one basket.

Network, Network, Network

Get in front of people. There is a greater likelihood of finding a job by spending a half an hour networking with someone each day, rather than spending the same amount of time on Internet job boards. You know how some people say finding jobs is all about who you know? There is an important element of truth in that.

"Eighty percent of people are hired through having some sort of connection with the company," explains Mansfield (2009). Talk to your friends, family members, and business acquaintances. Inform them about the kind of work or position you are looking for, so they can easily open their eyes and ears to help watch for leads to a job that could be right for you. Think of other networking avenues such as college or graduate school friends, professors, casual contacts, and work colleagues, and ask them for leads and suggestions.

If you are at a loss for where to begin your networking efforts, consider starting with the Michigan Renewable Energy Program (MREP; www.michigan.gov/mrep). MREP was created by state legislation and is implemented by the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC). "It consists of individuals and organizations with knowledge and experience in energy production, technology, education, and policy development... assembled to identify and address barriers to the advancement of renewables and recommend initiatives to increase renewable use in Michigan" (MREP, 2009). MREP currently has several committees that meet on occasion to discuss points of view and learn more about renewable energy applications from one another and from state and national experts.

Although networking is best done in person, almost all MREP meetings can be attended by teleconference and web conference, too. MREP also provides an email distribution list and a web-based Calendar of Michigan Renewable Energy Events that help keep subscribers informed.

If you're having trouble finding and meeting contacts in your preferred fields of interest, then make an effort to learn where you can meet the right kinds of people. In addition to MREP meetings, you might attend a conference or trade show or a lecture at a nearby college or university. You can even just study agendas and directories of recent events to build your own directory of potential contacts and businesses to research.

⁵ Productivity Portfolio;
http://www.timeatlas.com/web_sites/general/how_to_use_rss_in_your_job_search,
retrieved 30 Dec 2009.

Does the thought of servicing wind turbines over three hundred feet in the air sound positively exciting? Does alternative energy ignite your interest? Do you have a passion for creative design? When you meet some-one whose green career you envy or admire, start asking questions: What do they love about their job? What do they hate? Your initial perceptions might or might not match reality. Contact people in your preferred fields and ask them for an informational interview. In general, people will be happy to tell you about their work if you come well prepared and are respectful of their time. As you build your own network of contacts, it may be perfectly natural to incorporate these people into your search.

Finally, join, or even form, a group of job seekers that will meet regularly. The Riley Guide, as endorsed by Richard Bolles, suggests “many job search and networking clubs around the country can be very supportive as well as helpful in guiding you and increasing your network” (Dikel, 2009). The Riley Guide offers avenues for finding existing groups and even guides for launching your own. Joining or creating a job group can provide a lift in continued job searching and offer search strategies that you may have not otherwise thought of. Some job seekers may do everything right by textbook definition, but never land the interview let alone a job. Consider this option from the start of your search, not just if you reach a dead end.

What Kind of Background is Required to Land a Green Job?

You may feel your background does not directly relate to the green job that interests you, but you may bring a unique perspective that a relevant organization doesn't yet realize it needs. It's important to remain flexible. Your dream job may not be available right now, so broaden your perspective and think of related green jobs that use the same or similar skills. You may be able to volunteer, take classes, or work part-time in this new

field before committing yourself to working in it full-time.

Education and Training are Always Fruitful, But First Identify Whether You Need More and What You Need

Get training if you need it. Occupations are continuously being invented and reinvented, and many of the skills needed for today's careers were not taught routinely even a few years ago. If you are planning a major career change or redirection, education or training necessary to secure new qualifications will most likely pay for itself through higher compensation, as the demand for competent green employees continues to grow.

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Renewable energy training, for example, is becoming easier to find and financial support may be available to help you find your green path forward. As federal and state funding continue to flow into schools, programs will continue to both arise and grow. The State of Michigan's DELEG Energy Office (2009) hosts a list of Michigan institutions offering construction trade, energy efficiency, and clean technology training programs and curricula. Architecture, engineering, urban planning, training in building sciences, air conditioning, heating, refrigeration, and other energy technologies are just some of the career categories covered. Institutions throughout Michigan are listed with exact program names, descriptions, and contact information. Another great resource for degree and training listings is the Interstate Renewable

Energy Council.⁶ Their website indexes four-year universities and training providers anywhere in the U.S.

For recently displaced workers or for those looking to make a career switch, education may be a necessary complement for the tools already possessed from previous experience. Of course colleges and universities are starting degree programs for new green energy economic opportunities, but by far, most green jobs and green careers are simply new variations of traditional degrees and trades that require the same or similar skills as before.

In a [2007] study⁷ conducted by the American Solar Energy Society (ASES) and Management Information Services, Inc. (MISI), Roger Bezdek (principal investigator and an expert in economic research, analysis, and forecasting) headed the development of working definitions for the renewable energy and energy efficiency industries. This report used 2006 baseline data to forecast the growth of these two industries up to 2030, given three differing scenarios. Reading this report online can be helpful in understanding how standard jobs of the 20th century are transferring into to the 21st century green economy. The essence of the report reveals how today's professions are not going to require much different education or training than those of tomorrow. Bezdek (p. 3), notes needs for “accountants, engineers, computer analysts, clerks, factory workers, truck drivers, [and] mechanics.” However, be realistic about what you have to offer employers, and recognize that this competitive market might require furthering your current education or skill set. At least some Michigan schools already offer educational programs that could meet your needs.

⁶ IREC; <http://irecusa.org/irec-programs/workforce-development/>, retrieved 08 Feb 2010.

⁷ Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency: Economic Drivers for the 21st Century; <http://www.greenforall.org/resources/renewable-energy-and-energy-efficiency-economic>, retrieved 08 Feb 2010.

No Worker Left Behind

On August 1, 2007, Michigan's Governor Granholm introduced the No Worker Left Behind (NWLB) free tuition program to help residents with employment challenges in the State's broadly changing economy. "Michigan's economy is transforming into one that is knowledge based, as more and more manual labor is mechanized and computerized" (NWLB, 2009). The program's purpose is to equip Michigan workers with skills and educational abilities to adapt to the changing economy. It seeks to help unemployed workers and those working in low wage jobs, with finding employment in growing areas such as renewable energy. The two years of free tuition are to be applied toward a "degree or occupational certificate in a high-demand occupation or emerging industry; or in an entrepreneurship program... . The first 18 months of the program revealed that 62,206 people enrolled in training. Overall, 34,355 No Worker Left Behind participants completed training, and of those who completed training, 72 percent or 24,699 [trainees] either obtained or retained jobs" (NWLB, 2009). If this sounds interesting, act quickly because the sign-up deadline for this program is presently slated to end August 1, 2010.

A worker from General Motors, laid off after ten years of employment, decided to explore different career options at his local community college. After finding and completing a 16-week course paid for by NWLB, this former GM employee received a job working at Dow Corning in solar manufacturing. He claimed "out of the 23 students in the class, 11 had job offers before the class even concluded." During the press conference for the release of *Mapping Green Career Pathways* (Coxen, MacFarlane, Gordon, 2010), he noted the similarity of his experiences in relation to the report. This newly released study identifies training opportunities preparing workers for green-collar jobs in two very large Michigan sectors; construction and

manufacturing. Coxen, MacFarlane, and Gordon report, "Fully 55% of all new jobs in the emerging energy and efficiency industries are projected to be in the manufacturing and construction sectors." This report highlights existing training programs that can help bridge the gap for workers searching for green careers in the two fields of construction and manufacturing.

The application process for NWLB can be started at a Michigan Works! Association. These are workforce development associations designed to prepare job seekers for employment and provide skilled applicants to employers. Visit michiganworks.org, to find an agency near you and further explore available training opportunities to meet your needs. This is just one of many avenues for finding training.

Entrepreneurs Lead the Way

There is a possibility that your dream job doesn't exist. The new green economy has plenty of room for all sorts of innovative thinkers and entrepreneurs who have what it takes to start a business. Starting your own company in green niche markets may be attention-grabbing. Venture capital and business start-up funds are pouring into new green business development. There are plenty of books and online resources available to let you know what it takes and help you to determine a niche for yourself.

One such resource is *75 Green Businesses You Can Start to Make Money and Make a Difference* (Croston, 2008). In this work, Croston explains the mission, challenges, and resources needed to succeed. Croston believes that there is a green business waiting for you, no matter what your background and interests. Just as the internet boom accounted for 28% of job growth in the final decade of the 20th Century, green jobs are presently one of the largest and fastest growing sectors of the economy (Llewellyn, Hendrix, Golden, 2008, p. 20-22). Successful new businesses are being created all the time: Maybe yours will be successful, too.

Starting a new division or even just a position at an existing company may be a successful move as well. To an existing company looking to make a strategic green shift, an employee with green experience, educational background, or certification may be exactly what they need to overcome their hurdle. Through networking, it may be possible for you to clearly understand how your strategic plan can dovetail with a particular company's future goals. Energy engineers are a great example of positions that have been created as of recent. The Association of Energy Engineers⁸ may provide opportunities to connect with managers who have already made their own company divisions or positions.

Conclusion

As Bolles (2009) recognizes, the most important possession during a job search is hope. Do whatever you need to do to maintain it, without it, you will lose all momentum. It should help to know that green employment is growing, and growing fast. And remember, being green doesn't mean confining yourself to any particular niche. For every specialty, every college major, every level of expertise, and every interest, green jobs are available. The demand for environmental and atmospheric scientists, hydrologists, urban planners, landscape architects, sustainable designers, solar and wind energy technicians, green project financiers, and environmental teachers outstrips the average economic growth rate. Fleets of consulting firms are targeting green markets and hiring to serve them. In the past decade, worldwide growth in the wind and solar industries has exceeded about 25% per year. All this adds up to one thing: Going green is big business, and there are new jobs created every day to support green industries.

⁸ Association of Energy Engineers; <http://www.aeecenter.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=1>, Retrieved 19 Mar 2010.

Appendix A: Job Search Websites

AETNetwork BETA – Search for alternative energy stakeholders and technology development opportunities in Michigan. Find, connect, and collaborate with potential partners and industry leaders; aetnetwork.org/

Clean Edge Jobs – Source for clean-tech job seekers, employers, and recruiters; jobs.cleantedge.com/

CleanTech.Org – Virtual incubator for clean technologies, and a resource to scientists, inventors, entrepreneurs and investors interested in new clean technologies; cleantech.jobthread.com/

CleanTechRecruits – specialized employment website that brings job seekers together with leading clean technology companies that have renewable energy jobs to fill. <http://www.cleantechrecruits.com/>

The Energy Daily – Job Center helps connect members with new employment opportunities in energy jobs; www.theenergydaily.com/jobs.html

EnvironmentalCAREER.com – Committed to bringing together leading environmental employers with the best job candidates, for a better environment; www.environmentalcareer.com/

Environmental Career Opportunities – Recruiting and resource firm for the environmental, building, and energy sectors with over 25 years of experience connecting employers with talent for a sustainable future; <http://www.ecojobs.com/>

Green Collar Jobs Board- community members post and discuss local green news, events, tips, information, and jobs; <http://www.sustainlane.com/green-jobs>

Great Green Careers- Find jobs for solar energy, wind energy, sustainable building, clean tech, skilled trades, environmental health and safety, engineering, and much more; <http://www.greatgreencareers.com/>

Green Dream Jobs- provides global news and networking services to help green business grow, covering all sectors: renewable energy, green building, sustainable investing, and organics; <http://www.sustainablebusiness.com/>

Green Jobs Ready- a Solar and Wind Energy resources portal. Green Jobs Ready shares with the growing Green community news, views and trends in Wind and Solar Jobs. Provides training advice to individuals who are looking to get technical know-how in Wind Energy training and Solar PV training. <http://www.greenjobsready.com/>

GreenBiz.com- source for news, opinion, best practices, and other resources on the greening of mainstream business. Launched in 2000, its mission is to provide clear, concise, accurate, and balanced information, resources, and learning opportunities to help companies of all sizes and sectors integrate environmental responsibility into their operations in a manner that supports profitable business practices; <http://www.greenbiz.com/>

Grist Jobs: Green Jobs Board- connects socially and environmentally conscious employers with progressive, green-leaning job candidates. Posted jobs could range from general opportunities at socially responsible companies to corporate-sector jobs specifically focused on the environment or sustainability. Also contains environmental news and commentary; <http://jobs.grist.org/>

Idealist.org- interactive site where people and organizations can exchange resources and ideas, and locate opportunities and supporters; <http://www.idealist.org/>

Michigan Talent Bank- if you are thinking about your first career or a new career, DeLEG can tell you which occupations will be in greatest demand in the next few years. This site provides you with what Michigan jobs pay and what training you will need to get them. Many of the site's services are provided through Michigan Works! Service Centers; <https://www.michworks.org>

RenewableEnergyWorld.com- find the renewable energy job that is right for you; <http://www.renewableenergyworld.com/rea/about>

Solar Thermal Magazine- solar job board powered by SimplyHired. Learn about the companies that are making world wide solar thermal energy a reality; <http://solarthermalmagazine.jobamatic.com/a/jobs/find-jobs>

Treehugger- media outlet dedicated to driving sustainability mainstream. Strives to be a one-stop shop for green news, solutions, and product information; <http://www.treehugger.com/>

Website Resources for Hunting Green Jobs- Michigan Renewable Energy Program staff compiled this list of websites which may serve as useful tools for learning about and applying for green jobs; http://www.michigan.gov/documents/nwlb/hunting-green-jobs_309457_7.pdf

YAHOO! Hotjobs: Green Jobs- find green jobs, research salaries, and more; <http://hotjobs.yahoo.com/jobs-c-green>